

presently, as a too tender-hearted surgeon dealing with a victim, she added, "I hear through Cindy and Phyllis that Major Witherspoon has decided on a marriage for Nettie with Cyril Witherspoon, a distant cousin. He is a very prominent young lawyer in Richmond, and is now over at Featherstone."

I TOOK my hat and went out. On the porch hung my bird-cage, with silent Shakespeare brooding within. He opened his soul then and there and gave me back all that I had ever succeeded in teaching him. It seemed highly appropriate:

I love you, Nettie Moore, and my happiness is o'er,
For you've gone from my little cabin home!

Thereupon I opened his prison door and took him, all atremble, in my hand, went down beyond the garden, and tossed him into the air.

"Higher education is a failure, Shakespeare," I said.

He flew into the pecans and was silent. At dark I found him in his cage. Again I hurled him into the air, and this time I carried his cage back to the garret. For a few days he watched me reproachfully from the water oak; then a lady bird passed over toward Featherstone and he followed. He too had deserted me!

But I saw Nettie Moore occasionally, and every time I saw her the Virginian was part of the picture.

Well, if that was to be the end, it was time for Gordon pride to assert itself. I plunged into art with all my soul. There were other women in the world besides Nettie Moore!

Came spring and summer. They said about the house that she was to be a June bride. And there was to be a grand wedding over at Featherstone. And June was vanishing.

THEN one day the miracle happened. From the plumed spray of my water oak a gray bard whistled two lines of "Nettie Moore"; and as, amazed and thrilled, I waited, soft and low he rendered two lines of "Philip, My King."

"What!" I cried. "What! Who taught you that? Come down from that tree, you impudent scamp!"

And he came without waiting to hear me out, slanting to the lawn, switched in a grasshopper, prinked, preened, and to his songs again: first "Nettie Moore," and then "Philip, My King." I rushed to Cindy.

"Here, take this dollar," I cried, "and go over to Featherstone and find out if Miss Nettie owns a mockingbird, and if her mockingbird is loose!"

She was gone an hour. She came back with the information that Miss Nettie had "done turned her bird loose." I rushed then to the upper window and threw open the blinds. The Featherstone window was closed. What did it all mean? Why should she teach that bird to whistle "Philip, My King"? I found Dinah Craig's tender poem and read it with a swelling throat:

For we that love, ah! we love so blindly,
Philip, my king!

There had been no June wedding! There had been no wedding of any kind! And the Virginian from Richmond had departed! Something white under the pecans caught my fixed gaze; something that moved with a quickness and a sureness that made any theory of a depredating servant unlikely. Reaching to the porch from one side under my window was the limb of an elm. I jumped out, caught it, and swung lightly to the ground,—a boyhood trick,—and raced, not for the pecans, but for the gap in the hedge.

Nettie saw me coming and fled for the same point. She did not have time to lift and part the branches; she only lifted her skirts and dived through head foremost. There was a flutter of white garments, and then a display of hosiery—and I arrived. Alas for the trespasser! One little foot hung in the fork of an overgrown limb—one little foot, that kicked and wriggled desperately. The next moment its slim ankle lay in my hand and I had gathered its companion for company. One motion only sufficed to wrap the dainty lingerie round them, and one more to draw their owner through the gap.

SHE sat up, red of face and furious. "How dare you? How dare you?" she cried, looking at me through blinding tears.

I drew her closer and kissed the pouting lips. "But I am not, sweetheart!"

She lay a moment, looking up at me with an expression I had never before seen on a woman's face. "You love me, Philip?"

"Oh, my God!" I cried brokenly, holding her fast.

"And you won't let them send me away to Virginia? I don't want to go, Phil! I want to stay here—with you! Oh, it has been a hard fight—and you wouldn't come to help me! Besides, you kissed her!"

"I kissed her because her eyes were blue. I didn't think you would care."

"But I did! It broke my heart!"

"Come!" I said, rising with sudden determination.

She was on her knees now, both hands

She looked at me with wide-open eyes. I am sure I saw in them great admiration. Without another word she came through and laid her hand in mine.

"Where is the enemy?" I asked, holding fast.

"Library."

Nettie's eyes were turned downward, and she was thinking hard.

"Then lead me to him!" I commanded.

AND so we came to the library of Featherstone, which I saw for the first time, and into the presence of the enemy. He gazed silently on the drama for a moment. Then he stood looking at us, his features hardening and flushing. He did not have a chance to crush us in advance.

"Major Witherspoon," I said coolly, "I have come to tell you that I am going to marry your granddaughter. I thought you would—would like to know about it" (giggle by my side). "I have—have loved her since childhood, and she loves me!"

"You are—"

"Philip Gordon, sir, at your service!"

The Major reached back and took hold of a chair. I thought he wanted something to throw; but he wanted support.

"Get out of my house, you impudent young puppy!"

My nerve at the moment was the most amazing thing I ever possessed. I wonder at it yet. I was as cool as he was hot. "I shall, sir, since you command it, and since I am not in a position to resent your insult, as you probably calculate. But if you think to defeat us by such foolish talk, you are greatly deceived. I will never marry anyone but Nettie! Ask her!"

"Philip is quite right, grandfather," she interpolated serenely. "We have decided the matter finally."

He did not trust himself to speak. Perhaps he had lost the power. He reached out and drew Nettie to his side with one swift motion, and pointed toward the door. I had no difficulty in gathering his meaning: he wanted me to pass out.

"All right, Major," I said, with what, I trust, struck him as fine nonchalance. "I leave you. Nettie, keep up your courage—and wait!" Saluting, I wheeled and marched out. For the first time I felt like a full grown man.

POSSESSED by this new courage, I laid the whole matter before my grandmother. As I proceeded with my excited speech she ceased to knit and her hands rested in her lap. A little smile hovered about her lips.

"You did right, Philip. It was a bold and manly thing to do. Major Witherspoon will realize it himself when he cools off. It was your father all over, and I am proud of you! I am glad you did not use harsh language: words are living things and stick in the memory. You won in the contest, and you will win Nettie: how, I don't know quite yet. Give me until tomorrow to think it over, and don't mention the matter to your grandfather. Your hardest fight may be with him."

"But Nettie—what will the Major do with her?"

"Lock her up in her room for a while, I am afraid."

A thought lifted me clear of my chair, and before grandmother caught her breath I was in my room. The blinds of Nettie's room were open, and she was waiting with her flags.

"Sweetheart, how are you?" I wiggled.

"Prisoner!" she wagged.

"Do you still love me?"

"Yes! Do you still love me?"

"Yes!"

We kept this up until dark, and then substituted candles. But the candles would not stay lit. We wigwagged "Goodnight!" with matches.

THE next day my grandmother arrayed herself in black silk and lace, and, accompanied by Aunt Cindy, with Uncle Tom to drive, arrived in front of Featherstone. Disdaining doorbells and parlor, she walked into the library unannounced. The Major rose hurriedly to receive her, for once in his life dumb. Grandmother went close to him and stood for a moment



"Lancaster, what does this foolish quarrel of two old men amount to beside the beautiful love of a boy and girl for each other?"

I released her hurriedly, being naturally timorous. "I only brought you back to fill your pockets with pecans," I explained.

The blue eyes stared through their moisture a second, and then she laughed, covering her face with her hands and rocking back and forth.

I drew closer and whispered, "Sweetheart, I know!"

"Know what?" She stopped rocking. "Know what? Why, something a little bird told me!"

She was all interest and excitement. "Phil, did he go back?"

"Yes, he came, and he whistled 'Philip, My King'! That's me!"

"Silly! That song was written to a baby!"

"That's me too! He was a long time coming, sweetheart!"

Her lips parted adorably. "He is such a dull pupil!"

gripping my coat. There was panic in her face.

"I am going to tell your grandfather you are to be my wife. I have waited until I nearly lost you. Come!"

She shook her little head sadly. "You wouldn't live through it, Phil—or he wouldn't. Let me think."

"I can't wait any longer, Nettie! The best years of my life are wasted already! I was twenty-five. 'I will see him at once. After all, he is only a man.'"

"Yes; but he's my grandfather!"

Something within me rose in rebellion, something new. Vaguely I understood that I was getting good advice subconsciously, and that it was up to me to take command.

"Come!" I said, pushing through the hedge. "If you love me, stand by me! Let it not be said that a Witherspoon feared to follow where a Gordon led!"